

Homily for the Golden Jubilee of St. Conaire's NS, Shannon, 9th of September, 2018, St. John and Paul's Church

Bishop Fintan Monahan, Bishop of Killaloe and Patron of St. Conaire's NS

During the week I had the happy privilege of visiting a central place associated with the Patron, the *Founding Mother*, so to speak of St. Conaire's School. That location was *Inis Cathaighor* Scattery Island. In 1968 when the new school and new parish was looking for someone in terms of an ideal, an inspirational figure to look up to – who better than the feisty woman from Bantry in Cork, who was not afraid to break into the male dominated centre of piety and learning of St. Senanon Scattery Island. There she offered her services to continue to assist and develop the discipleship of Jesus Christ that was blossoming at that time in the Celtic Church. St. Conaire was certainly an example of adventure, persistence, determination and loyalty to the Christian faith in the face of challenge and adversity. How well that same school absorbed many of the strong qualities of this interesting saint for our time.

From Scattery to St. Conaire's

That day on Scattery island, getting a sense of our Christian heritage was a memory that will stand out for me for some time to come. So too was the memory of visiting St. Conaire's NS for Confirmation in Spring this year. I felt St. Conaire's was a place of genuine warm welcome, a place that one would like to work and live and engage with the exciting process that education is. So much of that of course is down to the great leadership and care and interest of the outstanding principal and staff and management there (past and present) who dearly love the students they serve.

Desire, need and commitment to Education

The roots of the 50 year old St. Conaire's National School, originally *Shannon Airport School Number 3* reach deep down into a creative spirit and support from the new community and parish (that is now 50 years old) of Shannon that celebrate this happy jubilee day today. We recall the proud tradition of the people of the surrounding area who brought about and developed things afresh here in Shannon half a century ago. The determination, foresight and courage of the founders of this school leaves us spellbound. Good things are much more resilient than is often supposed. For what we celebrate this morning, among other things, is that human hunger for wisdom and instruction which has here, as in so many places, proved stronger than the most dismal circumstances. It is a glorious appetite and it is essential to what makes us distinctively human.

Remembering the Past

This great milestone occasion is an opportunity to look back, remember and celebrate the achievements of those who have gone before us, who have invested heavily in this school. There can be a temptation to forget or fail to remember our past can be very great particularly in terms of relative prosperity. We need memory so that the experience of our ancestors is not ignored, to our very great peril. It is important that we today would appreciate the heroic efforts by those who have gone before us and have made our comparatively comfortable lives possible. A sense of history is very important for us if we are to remain realistic and keep our feet on the ground. Perhaps in very recent times we were inclined to lose that sense of history intended to forget the times when things were difficult.

Importance of Education

This morning, we celebrate a place of learning which is as essential to our society as any university. Crucial to our society will be schools and education. It is in great schools like St. Conaire's, steeped in love for the benefits of parish and community, with dedicated staff, Board of Management, Parents' Association that the battle will be fought and won. It is here that, working with a sense of history, we will be in a position to build a brighter future. There is a Chinese proverb which states 'if you plan for a year plant a seed, if for ten years plant a tree, but if you plan for 100 years then educate the people'. In the words of W.B. Yeats 'Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire. That fire that was lit 50 years ago is burning brightly today, thank God. Gabhann muid buíochas le Dia as ucht an suim agus spéis a bhí ag muintir na háite in oideachas anseo sa mbaile seo. Oideachas a chur chun cinn an oiread sin rudaí atá luachmahar agus tabhachtach dúinn– teagasc Chríostaí, tradisiúin na tíre seo, cluichí, ceol, cultúr, ceardaíochta, teanga, chomh maith le rudaí eile nach iad.

Celebration / Time for savouring memories

Today we mark the completion of a half centenary of education in this school. Former pupils of this school have taken their place and become leaders in our society here at home, across the country and in the countries to which they have emigrated. Today is a time for memories but for the Christian memory and hope will always be related. We thank God for what has been achieved in the past, and recognising our dependence on the Lord, we look to the future with confidence and hope.

Congrats and acknowledgement of Present school community

I warmly congratulate everyone associated with the school not only over the past “50 years a growing” as the Clare Champion to it but most especially the outstanding team at present who continue to make St. Conaire’s so special and so unique and such a thriving entity here in the parish and community.

Beannachtaí Deire

Comhghairdeachas le chuile dhuine a raibh baint acu leis an scoil. Buiochas speisialta leis na daoine a d’eagraigh an ócáid iontach, an tAifreann naofa seo. Buíochas do’n chór agus na ceoltóirí a bhí thar barr ar fad ar maidin. Go maire an scoil seo go ceann i bhfad. Ní caoga bliain eile ach mórán le cois air sin! Rath Dé ar chuile dhuine atá bainteach leis an scoil seo. Beannacht Dé oraibh ar fad agus bhur muintir anois agus i gconaí.